



**Maryann
Gallagher**

LAW OFFICES OF MARYANN GALLAGHER



**Mia
Munro**

GENIE HARRISON LAW FIRM



**Shannon
Ward**

AARONS WARD LAW FIRM

Being a trial lawyer and parent

Q & A BETWEEN THREE “MAMA LAWYERS” ABOUT THE UNIQUE CHALLENGES FACING PARENTS WHO ARE TRIAL LAWYERS

Many lawyers wonder how their life and practice will change when they add children into the mix of personal and professional life. They have questions, concerns, and often think deeply about these decisions when planning for a family (lawyers as a group, after all, tend to be folks who prepare for every eventuality they can think of).

Will judges, law partners, or their own calendar become obstacles instead of compatriots? What does a day look like when school ends at 3:30 p.m. and court ends at 4:30 p.m. on the other side of town? This article explores the unique challenges facing parents, and especially mothers (“Mama Lawyers”), in trial with an honest Q&A from the trial team of Maryann Gallagher, Mia Munro, and Shannon Ward, who all completed a two-and-half-month-long trial together (along with Martin Aarons) from November 2025 through January 2026.

Q. Did you have any hesitations about having children and being able to be a trial attorney at the same time?

Maryann: I was a trial lawyer for over 10 years before I became a mom. For me, being a mom has always been my dream job. I was of course concerned about how I would balance both and scared to try, but I am so grateful that I did! I have a very, wonderfully supportive husband who was by my side and we made it through together. For anyone hesitating, just do it; things will work out, trials do not last forever. It is like the first few months with your newborn, no sleep, exhaustion. You do not know *how you will* do it, but you far surpass anything you felt you are capable of and keep moving forward. You can do it; remember, the kids will grow up, trials are temporary, kids are forever.

Shannon: I was a trial lawyer before becoming a parent and was very nervous

about how it would all work. I’m lucky because my law partner is incredibly family-oriented and supportive. But I also heard so many horror stories about lawyers who were treated badly by male colleagues or opposing counsel because they became mothers and I worried about that a lot. I was in a call at one point with other female trial lawyers and I asked for advice about it. I’m really grateful to Courtney Rowley – she probably doesn’t remember this at all – but she said, “Let the men surprise you. I think you’ll be surprised by how supportive they can be.” It was such a simple idea that I honestly hadn’t considered: that maybe I wouldn’t be treated like less at all. And I’ve been so pleasantly surprised by how supportive our community has been. Sure, we all have a bad experience here and there with a judge or opposing counsel not being accommodating or even downright hostile, but I think that’s true whether you’re a parent or not.

Mia: I didn’t. When I became a mom, I had the privilege of seeing women like Maryann do it, and I’m grateful to all the women who paved the way. In my first year as an attorney, I served on a sexual assault and harassment trial with a team of all-female badass lawyers who mentored me and helped me set goals for myself. The year before I became a mom, I served as second chair on a pregnancy discrimination trial and first chair on a pregnancy discrimination arbitration. The work I do reflects how strongly I feel about breaking down barriers for women, especially moms. I wanted to be a mom and my career aspirations weren’t going to stop me. My strategy is to pursue everything I love and pivot if it becomes too much. I’d rather try and fail than not try at all. I’m still figuring out the balance between career and family and learning as I go. It isn’t easy, but I don’t mind a challenge.

Q. Is your partner also a lawyer? If so, what is it like for both parents to be attorneys? How do you handle scheduling?

Shannon: My husband, Austin Ward, is also a trial lawyer. He’s brilliant and incredibly skilled at trial work and I love that my life partner is also a lawyer. A lot of lawyers tell me they couldn’t imagine being married to another lawyer and I feel the opposite. We understand the demands of trial for each other better than someone else in another field would and it allows each of us to give grace to the other about work. Scheduling vacations can be tough with two trial calendars, and we had to start hiring someone to help with school pick-ups when we were both scheduled to be in trial at the same time (and both looked like they were going to go) a few years ago, but otherwise it’s great. We run themes and strategies by each other. We can break down evidentiary issues and give courtroom play-by-plays that require little explanation. But just as with everything else about marriage, it’s all about the person you’re with. Austin is genuinely supportive of my work and my happiness and shows that through not only “atta girl!” comments but by taking care of both of our kids’ needs when I’m in trial – doing school drop-offs, putting them to bed, dishes, lunches, taking care of the dogs. And when I know he’s going to be in trial, I put my galoshes on and get ready to hunker down in those same domestic trenches.

Mia: Yes. My husband, Jesse Creed, is a partner at his trial firm and is currently in trial. He is amazingly supportive (we did choose each other, after all!). Because we both work full time, we’ve had childcare from the beginning, though it isn’t 24/7. One of the best pieces of advice I got when pregnant was to create a detailed, agreed-upon plan for childcare,

Lawyer and Parent *continues*

selfcare, and work *before* the baby arrives. Doing this while we were still sane and not sleep-deprived removed room for resentment, especially in the early days. When schedules shift, we discuss and agree on how things will change. We still maintain a weekday schedule, though we can't always stick to it. Since we're both plaintiffs' attorneys, we understand each other's demands – depositions, mediations, trials, hearings, briefing deadlines, travel, or just stress detox – and we support one another. The key is communication, organization, and reciprocity. And that leads to equality. Without that, I'd go crazy.

Q. Did you have any particularly good or bad experiences while you were pregnant and a mama lawyer?

Mia: I worked until my due dates with both pregnancies and felt very supported in my workplace. I do remember one hostile interaction with a (female) defense attorney who seemed peeved by my pregnant belly. During a deposition, she repeatedly placed exhibits just out of reach, so I had to stand and lean across the table to retrieve them – with my very pregnant belly hanging over the edge. And there were a lot of exhibits. It didn't interfere with my ability to represent my client, but I think everyone present wondered what was wrong with her.

Returning to work after giving birth, exhausted and with babies who weren't yet sleeping through the night, was hard. I also struggled with the awkwardness of pumping at work. Fortunately, a female colleague had already walked me through what to expect and advised me to put a lock on my door so no one could walk in on me while I was pumping. I remember a mediator acting like I was high maintenance for asking for a private room to pump. Suffice it to say, that mediator hasn't received any business from me since – and won't.

Maryann: Yes, I tried one case when I was seven months pregnant, a medical malpractice case that was two weeks long. The male judge in that case did not have any compassion, when I had to drive two

hours to the diabetes test where you have to drink the sugary syrup and then be tested, I asked if I could have the entire day off from court so that I didn't have to drive four hours, take the test and proceed with questioning witnesses. The judge refused and insisted I be there in the afternoon. I won that case, by the way.

When I was younger, I worked at a litigation firm that I loved. I had a miscarriage on the morning I was set to pick a jury. My office was very nice and responsive and told the court. I was surrounded by men, male attorneys, male judge, and a decision was made that they would trail the case for two weeks and I would be back by then. I did as I was told, but that was a tough one. It wasn't out of animus, but just a lack of understanding of the extreme loss and grief of a miscarriage.

My hope is that judges and fellow attorneys understand the challenges of being pregnant and in trial, or having infants and nursing and being in trial, and allow us to be the moms we were blessed to be while we are being the trial lawyers we work so hard to be; please be kind.

Shannon: I'll share two contrasting experiences with opposing counsel, two contrasting experiences with the court, and a funny trial story. I had such extreme nausea in the first trimester of my first pregnancy that I was throwing up multiple times a day throughout the day every day. One of the only things that helped was constantly eating something – crackers, chips, hard candies, anything I could snack on. I had to defend two separate plaintiff depositions in that eight-week period when the nausea was at its worst. In the first, opposing counsel was extremely supportive. Offered breaks, asked how I was throughout the day, and even brought me chips to have as an extra snack. In the other, opposing counsel was extremely unsupportive, tried to refuse bathroom breaks, and also tried to insist that I wasn't allowed to eat during the deposition, "because you wouldn't be allowed to eat in court." I firmly told this attorney that the options were to suspend the deposition when I started vomiting during questioning or to allow me to snack while they were questioning my

client. They opted to allow me to snack.

With the court, I had to go in multiple times, usually on an ex parte application, to request trial continuances due to pregnancy and maternity leave. I recall one judge during my first pregnancy waiting until the very end of his morning calendar to hear ex parte applications. He then heard every ex parte application before mine, leaving me to the very end when no other attorney was still present in the courtroom. I thought, "Crap, he's about to deny my application and doesn't want witnesses. What am I going to do?" Instead, he congratulated me, wished me well, and we laughed about when I had come in two years earlier to ask for a continuance for my honeymoon.

In another case, defense counsel went in to request a trial continuance due to his own medical procedure, and while the court was granting it and looking at dates to move it to, tried to set the trial for during my maternity leave. When Martin pointed out that those dates wouldn't work because I was co-lead trial counsel and out on maternity leave, the court argued with him and then opted to set the trial for one week after I was scheduled to return from maternity leave. I'm not sure how I was supposed to prepare for trial in one week, but luckily it was continued again for other reasons later on.

We were also scheduled to start a trial when I was about six months pregnant with my daughter. Except it kept getting nudged back and back to an on-call date about 10 days before I was due to give birth. I honestly assumed that it would get kicked again and we'd try it after I returned from maternity leave. Instead, we were sent out to a trial court! We got through motions and two or three days of jury selection. Then, the night before opening statement, I was pacing around my hotel room preparing and started having contractions that were about five minutes apart. Martin drove me to the hospital, high-fived my husband, took a Lyft back to Riverside and gave my opening statement to the jury the next morning.

Q. How do you manage a litigation practice and children at different stages and what do you see as the greatest challenges with that stage?

Maryann: When I first started my own firm I had three boys under the age of seven. The guilt leaving your little baby is heart wrenching. I cried many, many days on the way to court leaving my little babies. But I knew they were in good hands. The more arms to hold them and love them, the better off they are. When they are elementary-school age, just take some time to do something special with them when you can, give them all your attention, ask them to plan a day with just you and them and they get to tell you what to do all day. In high school, my favorite thing to do when I was not in trial was to pick them up from school with their friends and just listen to them as we drove places. You get to hear all the good dirt. Now that they are in college, they have been so wonderful supporting me, thanking me and becoming amazing, smart men. Just remember to take the time when you are not in trial to focus some special days just with you and your child. You can do both, your kids will turn out fine.

Shannon: Having your own practice or working for a firm that allows a lot of autonomy or flexibility in how or when or where you get your work done is so helpful. If I need to take an afternoon to be at a school play, I add it to my calendar and work around it. Even during trial, I coordinated with the team to plan witness and to cover whatever came up on a certain afternoon so I could leave at the lunch hour to watch my daughter's winter show at school. You have to choose to prioritize it and hold fast to your boundaries and most people will respect them.

My kids are both still small, so my experience is limited in considering how the challenges change over time, but I think the greatest challenges I've come across so far are when the kids are under three years old. That's the time when they need you the most and also don't understand why you can't be with them. But they are resilient. They will miss you;

they might have a tough time for a little while you're in trial, but they adapt and then you're back with them. I also still carve out time for them during trials, like making breakfast together on Saturday mornings or going to a show together one night. Keeping pockets of time with them protected makes a big difference.

Mia: The greatest challenge for me was the sleep deprivation and rigid schedule. Before becoming a mom, I wasn't a morning person and did my best work in the evenings, when I was on a roll. When I had a deadline or something important coming up, I worked straight through the day until the late evenings, and even through the weekends if needed.

That all changed when I became a mom. I was now having to wake up at 5 or 6 a.m. instead of my prior usual 9:00. I'd work all day, exhausted, but with fewer hours to get things done because I needed to be home by 5 p.m. By the time the kids were in bed, I rarely felt like jumping back into work. That took some adjusting. Having both kids in school was a game-changer. I still leave the office earlier than I did before having kids so I can be home by 6 p.m. to have dinner with the family and try not to work on the weekends, though that isn't always possible. My husband and I pick up the slack for each other when work gets busy, but we spend most evenings and weekends with the kids. I know it won't be long before they're teenagers and may not want as much parent time, so I'm treasuring it while I can.

Q. How was your recent experience, being in a trial that extended from November to the end of January, all through the holidays with other mama lawyers?

Shannon: Doing the trial with other parents made a difference. I think there's a better understanding of the need for flexibility. And everyone was just so supportive of each other. Maryann would ask how the kids are almost every day. Mia and I would share stories together about the funny things our little ones do. I'd complain to Martin on the drive to court about how many times my

8-/9-/10-month-old would wake up in the night and he'd be sure to stop for coffee on our way in. But it was definitely a lot of work all around. A 2.5-month-long trial is a marathon at the best of times, doing it with small children really added the next level of planning, coordination, and exhaustion, but you find a way to make it all work and get to the finish line as a team.

Mia: Second-chairing for Maryann was awesome because she truly understands being a mom and the importance of time with the kids. Some days were busier than others. I chose to work a lot over Thanksgiving weekend but took Thanksgiving day off. I didn't mind trial work around the holidays. Everyone on the trial team was accommodating and understanding, and we all wanted to spend as much time with our families during the holidays as we could. But we were also motivated to work hard for our clients.

Maryann: I had another trial years ago around Christmas and it was a great experience with jurors, everyone is happy around Christmas, but it was over before Christmas. This trial started November 17th, it went through Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's. It was easier on me now that my kids are grown. I greatly appreciate Shannon and Mia juggling the trial and I know it was much harder on them than on me. Being able to support each other really helped us get through this trial.

Q. How do you handle the challenges of being in trial and taking care of young children who are exposed to every cold and flu?

Mia: My family went through several rounds of colds or viruses during the trial, which is typical for us with young kids. I caught a cold right as trial started and lost my voice, but (thankfully) had enough of it during voir dire to participate. I had Airborne every day, and one of our clients brought me honey tea in the mornings to help soothe my throat. At one point, I noticed there were around five different brands of cough drops circu-

lating between the plaintiff and defense trial teams.

Maryann: Kids are petri dishes, September and January are the worst months. The cold and flu goes around the entire family. If you can, stay in a hotel for the most difficult days in trial or if everyone at home is sick. Your partner can take care of the kids for a few days. Drink “Emergen-C” every day, starting from the FSC through trial, take your pre-natal vitamins – if they are good enough for before baby – they are good enough for after baby when you are in trial!

Shannon: I think I was sick about five times during this trial. I had strep. I had a stomach flu. I got a cold more than once. Maryann was prepared! It’s that “seasoned trial lawyer and mother” preparedness. She had extra vitamins on hand, tissues, cough drops, the whole shebang. I will definitely start keeping a kit for trial that has all the essentials in it.

Q. Do you notice any difference during discovery or depositions in how you are treated as a mama lawyer?

Maryann: I think generally throughout litigation, the biggest difference is men get more sleep. As a mama lawyer, I would be getting the three boys ready for school, making sure they had their homework, their lunch, their uniforms and getting them out the door – all before I was able to focus on the 8:30 a.m. appearances. I would be jealous of the guys who just got to wake up and focus on preparing for the hearing without any other responsibilities.

We are doing all of this before we start taking depositions. This is again a request to be kind. If a mama lawyer needs a little extra time, second call in court, or a little extra time to finalize exhibits for deposition, be kind and allow her the grace to be able to do her best at both jobs she is trying to do at the same time.

Shannon: I’m not sure if it’s becoming a parent or just getting more experience as an attorney, or maybe both, but I think I have less patience for things that aren’t really that important and also am more willing to push for the things that I

know matter. This really becomes noticeable when I get out of trial and come back to discovery games that are just a waste of time. We both know I’m asking for discoverable information, so we’ll meet and confer and if defense counsel won’t produce it, I’ll file the motion.

Mia: Being a mom has actually helped me connect better with opposing counsel – many of whom are parents themselves. Having something in common reminds us that we are all human. I’ve gotten mom advice from opposing counsel, and we’ve commiserated about the challenges of being mom lawyers. One opposing counsel influenced my choice of hospital after telling me her harrowing birth story. Another convinced me to revoke YouTube access for my kids. That doesn’t mean everyone is understanding. I think some judges need education on the importance of accommodating parents, particularly moms. The fact that legislation had to be passed requiring courts to provide lactation accommodation shows we still have a way to go.

Q. What would you want to tell other trial lawyers who are considering becoming a parent or parents who are thinking of becoming a trial lawyer?

Maryann: Do it! I have been handling both jobs for 28 years and loving every minute of being a mama lawyer. There is no success without failure. There are really, really tough times when you feel like there is not another piece of you that you could possibly give to anyone, but keep your end goal in mind. Mine was to take care of my children’s school all through so they didn’t have any loans, and give them the best life possible. Your career will flow that way. You cannot do it alone, please, please don’t be afraid to ask for help. You deserve it, you are working two full-time jobs at the same time, you are going to need others to help pull the rope with you.

Shannon: I’ve found that being a parent helps connect me to other people more. I’m even better at communicating damages now than I was before I became

a parent. There’s a certain depth of feeling and understanding that is hard to imagine without experiencing it firsthand. Having access to those depths and being able to fully understand and empathize with people on that level makes me a better person and a better trial lawyer.

To do both, you need a community and a plan. Who is doing morning drop off? How are the kids getting home from school? Where is dinner coming from? What happens if the kids get sick while you’re in trial? Who is doing nighttime feedings if the baby is still waking up? When does your partner/spouse get a break? Will you go home before bedtime and then work more afterwards or work straight through until you’re finished and go home? If your original plan for childcare falls through (e.g., school closure or dad is sick/in court), do you have a back-up plan?

Whether it’s close friends or family or folks you hire to help you for the short term or the long term, being in trial and being a parent is something that is incredibly difficult to do alone. Each of them is a lot of work on their own, but being a full-time parent during the middle of a trial will result in no sleep. And you won’t be able to be the best trial lawyer you can be or the best parent you can be without sleep.

Shonda Rhimes gave a college commencement speech and talked about “having it all,” and what that means for her as a successful professional and a mother and talked about how it’s not possible to be giving 100% to all things at the same time. I think that’s an important message to remember for being a parent and a trial lawyer as well – when you’re in trial, you won’t be the best version of yourself as a parent and you will need help to fill those gaps for your kids while you’re doing that. Then there will be times when you prioritize your family and work takes a back seat for whatever period of time that takes. Accept that both things are true. Overall, being both a parent and a trial lawyer can make you

better at both jobs. So, if it's something you want, you can make it work.

Mia: We can't control life – it happens. Don't take an opportunity to have a child for granted, and don't take a trial opportunity for granted either. Maybe trial life is for you, maybe it isn't. You won't know unless you try it. Have a support network at home and in the legal community ready for when you need it. Choose who you try your cases with – some lawyers need help, and some love helping attorneys at trial. Try cases with other women

who are parents, and don't hesitate to reach out to them. Join women's groups in bar associations where members support each other, whether in trial or not. And don't forget – pay it forward!



Maryann Gallagher owns her own firm, Law Offices of Maryann Gallagher, and is of counsel with Genie Harrison Law Firm and litigates all types of employment cases. She has three boys, ages 21 to 28 and started her firm when her boys were 1, 5, and 7 years old.

Shannon Ward is a partner at Aarons Ward where she focuses on cases involving harassment or abuse, discrimination, retaliation, and wrongful termination, along with her law partner Martin Aarons. She has a 6-year-old daughter and 1-year-old son.

Mia Munro is a partner at Genie Harrison Law Firm and represents employees in individual and representative actions. She has two boys, 5 and 8 years old.